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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 0600
18 March 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
18 March 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam as of 0600 EST

Communist Military Developments

1. No unusual Communist military developments have been detected within the past 24 hours.

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4. Reports that North Vietnam is evacuating women and children from Hanoi are grossly exaggerated, according to the Canadian ICC permanent representative in Hanoi. This observer also states that there is no apparent war hysteria in Hanoi. He believes the people are concerned but feels that sufficient discipline and feelings of patriotism have been built up to prevent panic.

South Vietnam Political Developments

5. The GVN Defense Ministry has announced that local security forces yesterday drove off some 1,700 demonstrators who sought to march on the capital of Phu My District in Binh Dinh Province. One civilian was killed and 100 were arrested. The demonstration was attributed to the Viet Cong. Buddhist-Catholic communal tensions have for some time been particularly

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troublesome in this Central Vietnamese coastal province, giving the Viet Cong a potent local issue to exploit in their increasingly successful politico-military drive here.

6. In a wide-ranging conversation with Deputy Ambassador Johnson today, Premier Quat outlined further plans for strengthening his government's image and for enlisting political support. He said the National Legislative Council would be convened shortly and that he planned to enlist reputable non-government politicians in a national propaganda campaign against "neutralism and defeatism." Quat also said he plans to seek early and fair trials for those implicated in the abortive coup attempt of 19 February. He was evasive, however, when Johnson asked why Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, a ringleader of the coup attempt, had not been arrested. Thao, operating from various hiding places in the Saigon area, has been trying since the coup to stir up further trouble.

7. Quat stressed to Johnson the favorable effect US/GVN air strikes on the north have had on South Vietnamese morale. He claimed that the strike on the Phu Qui complex had had an especially favorable psychological effect, noting that many northerners now living in Saigon had come from that area and considered it very important militarily.

8. The premier indicated that he planned no action against the peace movement of Buddhist monk Quang Lien unless it gathered significant steam. He noted that Lien now is opposed by the Buddhist leadership.

9. The government yesterday moved against another peace movement. According to the press, police prevented a new group sponsored by a minor Cao Dai faction from holding a press conference at a Saigon hotel. This Cao Dai faction has issued a vague call for a neutral Vietnam under some kind of US guarantee.

10. The final contingent of the South Korean force, consisting of engineering, transportation, and security troops, arrived in Saigon yesterday. The total force numbers 2,000.

[REDACTED]

Viet Cong Military Activity

11. There have been no significant Viet Cong military attacks reported in the past 24 hours.

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Communist Political Developments

13. Peiping's propaganda response to the latest US air strike in North Vietnam appears designed primarily to play on the apprehensions of neutrals in the free world by implying that intensification of military action against the DRV will only remove any possibility of negotiations and increase the likelihood of a larger war.

14. A tough editorial from People's Daily, broadcast by NCNA on 17 March, called the bombing attack of 15 March a new step to escalate the conflict which demonstrated that talk about peaceful settlement and open political channels is nothing but "shameless war blackmail." Asserting that the DRV "cannot be bullied," the Chinese declare that the more the war is enlarged, "the more impossible will be the prospect of a political settlement."

15. The editorial calls for a "war of anti-aggression" by the Vietnamese people to counter new US blows against the DRV. Although the Chinese avoid any commitment to take part in this struggle, they repeat previous hints at the possibility of Peiping's participation by declaring that sustained pressure on Hanoi gives "the initiative to the DRV and all countries upholding the Geneva agreements to strike back."

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16. Although the USSR is holding to a public position of uncompromising support for North Vietnam, private Soviet approaches to US officials continue to stress Moscow's interest in an eventual negotiated settlement.

17. Moscow has rejected the British proposal of 20 February for joint action by the Geneva co-chairmen to explore a peaceful settlement and has published a Soviet draft co-chairmen message which condemns alleged US violations of the Geneva Agreements and demands that US forces stop "aggressive actions" against North Vietnam and withdraw from South Vietnam.

18. In contrast to this unyielding public posture, the Soviet ambassador to Luxembourg told his US colleague on 15 March that the US and the USSR, as the "only nations which really count," should be able to work out a solution which would remove the risk of war. He contended that Peiping, not Hanoi, is the "real obstacle" to a settlement and argued that air attacks against North Vietnam would not bring a solution because Hanoi is "not the problem." The Soviet ambassador repeated earlier private warnings that if the conflict escalates, the USSR may not be able to avoid involvement.

19. In discussing possible terms for a settlement, the Soviet ambassador indicated that an arrangement involving the withdrawal, under appropriate guarantees, of all foreign forces from South Vietnam, including the North Vietnamese, "seemed reasonable."

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